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ABSTRACT

The Intensive Reading Improvement Program (IRIP) was implemented in Chicago, Illinois elementary schools after standardized test results, first published in 1969, indicated the need for improvement. IRIP had four goals: to increase motivation in both students and teachers; to extend teachers' understanding of a good developmental reading program; to emphasize specific techniques for teaching reading; and to increase parent and community participation. Reading resource teachers were relieved of their regular teaching assignments, in order to receive special training for IRIP teaching. Their training consisted of sixty hours in reading theory and instructional technique. The program grew to include 203 teachers in 186 schools, with a budget exceeding three million dollars. The program evaluation focused on the characteristics of selected teachers and schools; reading achievement gains; participant satisfaction regarding the teacher training; actual activities of IRIP teachers; and opinions of related staff. As a result of the evaluation findings, five recommendations were made: (1) revise and prioritize the guidelines for teachers' responsibilities; (2) revise the written training materials; (3) eliminate teachers' noninstructional duties; (4) monitor teacher activities; and (5) provide forums for teachers to meet and exchange ideas. (GDC)

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An Evaluation of the
Intensive Reading Improvement Program

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In the late 1960s there was a major teacher shortage in Chicago. Up to 5,000 teachers a year were hired on a provisional basis. Many of these teachers had not had education courses or supervised student teaching experience. Moreover, regular elementary certificates did not require specific training in how to teach reading. When standardized reading test scores, published for the first time in 1969, showed that Chicago school children were well below national norms, the need to improve reading instruction was apparent to administrators, teachers, and parents alike.

One of the Board of Education's responses to this problem was to initiate the Intensive Improvement Reading Program known in Chicago by its acronym IRIP. The program's theoretical underpinnings were studies indicating that the successful teaching of reading depended more on the skills and knowledge of the teacher than on the particular methods or materials used. The program had four basic objectives:

1. to stimulate an interest in reading and to motivate teachers and students to set higher performances of expectations;
2. to extend teachers' understanding of the essential elements of a good program of developmental reading;
3. to reinforce, review, or introduce specific techniques for teaching reading; and
4. to involve parents and community in the school reading program through volunteer activities, informational meetings, and other supportive efforts.

In order to meet these objectives, the program provided that one teacher in selected elementary schools would be freed of classroom teaching responsibilities. This freed teacher, known as the reading resource or IRIP teacher, was then given extensive inservice training in the theory and practise of teaching reading. Her primary responsibility was to pass on the knowledge and skills she aquired at district and citywide inservices back at her local school. The IRIP teacher was also expected to provide support for classroom

teachers in other areas including identifying, ordering and distributing appropriate reading materials, developing and maintaining a resource file, keeping student records, demonstrating good instructional techniques in other teachers' classrooms, consulting with teachers on reading issues, and initiating and coordinating a parent involvement program.

Resource teachers were chosen by principals on the basis of instructional skill, leadership ability and rapport with the faculty. They were given 60 hours of training in reading theory and instructional technique by outstanding reading teachers from local schools, consultants from the Department of Curriculum, and nationally known, university based reading experts.

Twenty-seven schools, one from each district, were selected for instruction in the program at its inception in 1970. Evaluations of the program during its formative years found that students in IRIP schools gained about 10 months in reading comprehension during a seven month period between successive administrations of the Metropolitan 70 Reading Achievement Test. However, reading gains varied considerably across age cycles (grades). Early evaluations also found that IRIP teachers and classroom teachers in IRIP schools improved their scores on the Artley-Hardin Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading given before and after IRIP teachers had received inservice training.

Bouyed by these early indications of success, the program experienced phenomenal growth. It now includes 203 teachers in 186 schools. Its original budget has increased more than five-fold to a current level of over \$3 million dollars. Originally closely monitored by central office staff, the sheer size of the program now prevents all but the most cursory contact between staff in the Department of Curriculum and teachers in the field. Without this close contact, administrators in the Department of Curriculum felt increasingly "in the dark" about how the program was being implemented, what IRIP

teachers were actually doing on a day-to-day basis and what the central office might do to maximize the effectiveness of the IRIP position. Moreover, there had been no follow-up evaluations of the program. No one knew if the optimistic assessments of the program in its nascency persisted during its period of expansion.

There was, then, interest on the part of both the Department of Curriculum (DC) and the Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) in determining what changes occurred in the program during its evolution, what type of support IRIP teachers believed was most needed from the central administration, and what effect the program was having on reading instruction and reading achievement in the Chicago public schools.

The Evaluation

The actual evaluation of the IRIP program became the responsibility of staff at the DRE. However, planning sessions at each step in the process included administrators in the DC who had direct administrative authority over the program. This joint planning ensured the study addressed issues of concern and interest to both departments.

The multi-method evaluation designed by the two Departments included:

1. A statistical analysis of the education and experience of the teachers appointed to the IRIP position.
2. A statistical analysis of the characteristics of schools to which an IRIP teacher was appointed compared to those schools which did not have an IRIP teacher.
3. A statistical analysis of the effects of the IRIP position on reading achievement scores of students in IRIP schools.
4. A participant observation study of the training sessions for new IRIP teachers. This component included a questionnaire completed by all 98 attendees. It asked for their opinions concerning the usefulness of the sessions, the appropriateness of their format, the quality of the presentations, and the practicality of their content. Participants were also invited to recommend changes for future inservices.
5. A questionnaire distributed to all IRIP teachers asking them to list their five most time consuming activities, their five

most important duties, and activities unrelated to reading which they are required to do. The questionnaire also asked them to indicate how satisfactory they found 11 aspects of the IRIP administration of the IRIP program.

6. Structured interviews of staff who have day-to-day have contact with the IRIP program at various levels. Included among those interviewed were nine district reading coordinators, 13 principals in IRIP schools, 6 principals in schools without an IRIP teacher, 18 IRIP teachers, and 6 classroom teachers in schools having an IRIP teacher.

Results of the Evaluation

Statistical analyses indicated that IRIP teachers have been, as intended, systematically placed in schools with greater impediments to attaining good reading performance than exist in the average Chicago elementary school. For instance, IRIP schools are larger, have a higher percentage of students from low income families, spend more per pupil on security, and have higher vandalism costs per pupil than non-IRIP schools. IRIP schools also have a higher percentage of teachers with less than 6 years experience, and lower student attendance rates. It is not surprising, then, that reading achievement in IRIP schools is lower than that in non-IRIP schools. However, even when the effects of school size and pupil poverty were statistically equated, there was still no evidence that the presence of the IRIP position enhances students achievement.

Analyses of the teacher background data indicated that IRIP teachers were generally experienced in terms of years in the system and tenure at their school. This data suggests that IRIP teachers would be well acquainted with local reading needs. Most of the IRIP teachers also had some graduate level coursework in how to teach reading. Statistically, they appeared to be well suited in terms of education and experience for the position to which they have been assigned.

The questionnaires distributed to new IRIP teachers following inservice training indicated that they wanted more information on how to manage the Continuous Progress reading curriculum and less information on theories about reading and teaching. Respondents to the questionnaire also stated that sharing ideas with other resource teachers was the most valuable aspect of the citywide training sessions. They clearly indicated that more time should be devoted to small roundtable discussions among IRIP teachers rather than using a lecture format exclusively.

The questionnaire distributed to all IRIP teachers indicated that tasks which IRIP teachers listed as the most important for developing and maintaining a comprehensive school reading program were not necessarily those activities which took most of their time. In other words, IRIP teachers reported spending much of their time doing tasks which they regarded as relatively unimportant such as testing and tutoring students, distributing materials, and maintaining records. Many IRIP teachers (80%) also reported that they were required to perform various tasks which are unrelated to school's reading program including monitoring students in the hallways, at lunch and during recess, substituting for absent teachers, and performing administrative tasks for the principal such as writing reports, ordering textbooks, and disciplining students. Veteran IRIP teachers echoed their newly appointed colleagues by citing the need for more information on the Continuous Progress curriculum and more time to exchange ideas at their inservice training sessions.

The staff interviews were a rich source of information about the IRIP program. There was agreement at all levels among interviewees that the IRIP program makes a clear difference in the smooth and effective imple-

mentation of the Continuous Progress curriculum, as well as the coordination of the school's own reading program. Interviewees noted that the quality and impact of the IRIP program in a school varies widely due to differences in personality among IRIP teachers and differences in how principals understand and use the position. They confirmed that while the program operates according to guidelines in many schools, a number of principals use IRIP teachers for non-reading related assignments. There was universal agreement that, above all else, an IRIP teacher needed good interpersonal skills to make the position a success.

The picture that emerged from the various evaluation components was that of a highly valued program which had diverged considerably from original staff development or inservice orientation. The program had evolved, instead, into one in which the IRIP teacher provides direct service to teachers in the form of planning the reading program, testing and monitoring students, and distributing materials. These functions have been particularly important for the successful implementation of the Continuous Progress curriculum with its myriad objectives and criterion-referenced tests. However, neither the IRIP training sessions nor IRIP written guidelines have been revised to reflect this fundamental change. This has resulted in a disjunction between the how the program operates, or should operate, in the field, and the conceptual and administrative framework that supports it. Thus there was little relationship between what the IRIP teachers were doing and what they were being trained to do.

The evaluation report concluded that there needs to be a reorientation of the IRIP program. The administrative focus on improving the reading instruction skills of the classroom teacher, while important, had become less crucial

than the IRIP teacher's role facilitating the management of all aspects of her school's Continuous Progress reading curriculum. A series of recommendations were made.

1. Revise the written guidelines so that they more adequately represent the responsibilities that IRIP teachers have assumed. Establish priorities for the tasks so that IRIP teachers will not feel obligated to perform all jobs with equal vigor.
2. Revise the written training material to include practical teaching strategies and material on managing the Continuous Progress curriculum.
3. Prohibit the use of IRIP teachers as substitutes, hall monitors, and the like.
4. Establish a framework for monitoring IRIP teacher activities. This would reduce the incidences of misuse of the position and provide a network for communication among IRIP teachers and between teachers in the field and reading policy makers in the central office.
5. Provide forums for IRIP teachers to meet and exchange ideas with each other. Reduce the number of large, citywide inservice meetings and initiate a series of district wide and cross district meetings. Edit and disseminate to all IRIP teachers written summaries of ideas and strategies discussed at all local and citywide meetings.

Impact of the Evaluation

The report, completed at the end of the summer 1978, was sent to the Department of Curriculum where it was read and critiqued by several Bureau heads. It has not enjoyed wide circulation and its major recommendations were not warmly received. However, several changes that were recommended in the evaluation have been implemented in the last six months. All of these changes have two things in common: they involved modifications of existing structures or procedures and they did not require the expenditure of additional money.

In January of this year, an announcement appeared in the Superintendent's Bulletin reminding principals that IRIP guidelines prohibited the use of IRIP teachers as substitutes. It also cautioned principals against using the position to fill a dual role such as reading resource teacher and adjustment teacher, or librarian, etc. It further reminded principals that IRIP teachers were to be given release time to attend citywide inservices.

Citywide inservices are less frequent this year than last and the number of district level meetings have been increased. The topics for discussion at the inservices are now selected on the basis of what IRIP teachers indicate they need in a survey conducted by the Bureau of Reading Improvement. The citywide inservices now include a number of small group sessions where IRIP teachers can discuss common problems. An IRIP newsletter has been initiated to further enhance communication among IRIP teachers. These changes, recommended in the evaluation, have been easy to implement and have had an immediate positive impact on teachers in the field. However, many other recommendations, such as revising the guidelines and the IRIP manual, have not been seriously considered.

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The report might have served the larger purpose of stimulating discussion of more substantial changes in the objectives and structure of the program. However, the report has yet to be officially released and the restricted audience to which it has been circulated does not appear eager to share it with others. Thus, the department's efforts to enhance utilization of evaluation findings through cooperative planning has not been a notable success in this instance.